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SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S RE-RUN ELECTIONS: PREP IMPROVES, MAJOR
PROBLEMS PERSIST

REF: YAOUNDE 929

Classified By: Poloff Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 30, Cameroon held re-run elections for 17 parliamentary seats following a Supreme Court ruling that invalidated the July 22 election results for these seats because of gross irregularities. The ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) did predictably well, winning 13 of the 17 seats. The small SDF and UNDP parties each gained two seats, while the opposition UPC lost a place in parliament for the first time in 15 years. While the September 30 election was a slight improvement over July, it was marred by major systemic problems and a poor grasp of democratic practices by all involved, especially the political parties. End summary.

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The Ruling Party Wins, UPC Out
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¶2. (SBU) According to the government's initial "trends" (final results are not yet out), the CPDM took 13 of the 17 seats in this election, while the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) gained two seats (in the Douala constituency), enabling it to form a Parliamentary group. The National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), aligned with the CPDM in government, gained two seats in the Far North Province, its traditional base of support. The big loser was the Cameroonian People's Union (UPC) -- the offspring of the national independence movement -- which was defeated in its Center Province, ethnic Bassa stronghold, and will not have a seat in the National Assembly for the first time in 15 years. The UPC's loss may spell the political demise of its party head, former Minister for Planning (until the September 7 shuffle) and longtime political heavyweight Augustin Frederic Kodock. The other noteworthy loser was Douala businesswoman and CPDM party boss Francoise Foning, who had guaranteed CPDM victory in her Douala constituency, only to lose two of the CPDM's four seats to the SDF. Voter turnout was reportedly low (lower than 20 percent in Douala).

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Preparations Improve, Problems Persist
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¶3. (C) Post fielded six observation teams covering all five constituencies in this election. We found that administrative preparations for the elections (handled by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, or MINATD) had generally improved over the July election. MINATD's task was vastly simplified: elections in five constituencies and one municipality on September 30 versus 58 constituencies and 360 municipalities during the July 22

exercise. Nonetheless, it was evident that MINATD sought to address some problems identified in the July exercise. In the Extreme North Province, for example, GRC officials held two supplemental training sessions to hammer home the responsibilities of voting bureau presidents. Responding to criticisms (including from this Embassy) about the substandard indelible ink used to mark voters hands, MINATD provided more and better quality ink this time around, though Embassy teams observed some voters removing the ink with little difficulty.

13. (C) Despite these improvements, a heightened sense of vigilance, and the generally peaceful nature of this election, the electoral process continued to be marred by major shortcomings. The complicated voter registration system created substantial barriers to voter participation and vulnerabilities for voter fraud. Flaws in the voter register resulted in numerous duplicate names. The sub-standard ink rendered ineffective the single best deterrent against multiple fraudulent voting. The ballot system undermined the secrecy of the voting process and led to voter intimidation and vote-buying. (Note: in a system inherited from the French, voters received individual ballots for each political party and had to insert one in the ballot box while discarding the others. Voters could easily walk away with unused ballots for reuse by others -- and we saw evidence that this happened. End note.) Compounding these systematic problems was the poor understanding of the democratic process by administrative officials, civil society groups, election monitors and, especially, the political parties. CPDM and opposition party observers, for example, were involved at every step of the process, but did not appear to grasp the significance of their roles (e.g., to proactively protect their parties against fraud or error).

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15. (C) Comment: The CPDM's control of the National Assembly was already unassailable, so the political stakes for this election were limited. Our take-away from this election round is two-fold: first, the GRC and MINATD are capable of running cleaner elections than they did on July 22; second, Cameroon's electoral system has massive vulnerabilities that politicians continue to exploit to the detriment of democratic process. As we continue to engage the GRC on setting up the independent elections body (ELECAM) and on preparations for the anticipated presidential 2011 elections (and likely constitutional reform), we will focus on these two fronts: improve the system, and improve the performance.

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